Children’s Economic Well-Being in Single-Parent Families:
Gender and Lone Parent versus Multigenerational Households

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Background
- Extensive research has linked child poverty to a host of negative outcomes in adulthood, such as poor health, economic insecurity, and behavioral problems.
- 22% of all children are poor, and 2/3 of all poor children live in single-parent families, a diverse group with differences in child outcomes by parent’s gender and household composition:
  - Children of single mothers are at the greatest disadvantage.
  - Parents who lack essential economic resources are more likely to live in multigenerational households.
  - Household composition is linked to resource flows and shapes eligibility for public assistance.

Prior Research
- Single-Parent Families:
  - 24% of US children live with single parents without cohabiting partners.
  - A growing share of single-parent families are father-only families.
  - Single fathers have smaller families, are less likely to be poor, more likely to be employed and are better off economically than single mothers.
  - Poor and near poor father-only families are less likely to receive public assistance than poor and near poor mother-only families.

Household Composition:
- Single-parent families face economic burdens by living with their parents, though this decreases their likelihood of public assistance receipt.
- 2/3 of children in multigenerational homes with their fathers would be poor if they only lived with their father.

Present Study: Research Questions
- Provides a demographic comparison of children’s economic well-being in lone and multigenerational households.
- Examines share of children below official and relative poverty thresholds and the share of those receiving public assistance.
- Provides the odds of both poverty status and public assistance receipt net of demographic characteristics.
- Expands on current child poverty literature by examining the role of parent’s gender and household types among single-parent families (without cohabiting partners).

Data and Sample
  - Lone household: Unmarried parent, no cohabiting partners, no other adults present
  - Multigenerational household: Includes unmarried parent, no cohabiting partner, no other adults present

Sample Size:
- Lone, with Mother: 6,801
- Lone, with Father: 1,367
- Multigenerational, with Mother: 1,158
- Multigenerational, with Father: 186
- Note: Analyses are weighted to provide representative data.

Results

Conclusions
- This study shows the considerable diversity of children in single-parent families and highlights the importance of both parent’s gender and household composition for children’s economic well-being.
- Gender:
  - Parent’s gender remains a significant predictor of poverty among children in lone households. Children of lone mothers have the highest odds of falling into poverty compared to all other groups.
  - The odds of falling into poverty do not differ significantly by parent’s gender among those in multigenerational households.
  - Children living with single fathers are less likely than those living with single-mothers to receive school lunch subsidies.
  - Children with their mothers have higher odds of receiving EITC than those with their fathers.
- Household Composition:
  - Net of demographic characteristics, children in lone parent households are more likely than their counterparts in multigenerational households to be in poverty.
  - Children in multigenerational homes are less likely to gain assistance through the Earned Income Tax Credit.
  - Children in multigenerational households are younger, and are more likely to have young, never married parents than those in lone households. They are less likely to have a highly educated parent or to live with siblings.
  - Children in lone households have higher odds of receiving SNAP and school lunch assistance than those in multigenerational homes.

Limitations & Future Directions
- This study is unable to address the issue of selection into these household types.
- This study was unable to address the issue of selection into these household types – children in multigenerational households benefit from having grandparents who are willing and have the resources to take them in.
- Questions to be addressed in future research include:
  - How are children’s movements in and out of poverty influenced by changes in family structure and household composition?
  - What other factors encourage or discourage public assistance receipt among single-parent families?

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